

Why Are Our Good Works Accepted?

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the sincere works of the believer are accepted by God in Christ, though imperfect in sin
2. aim – to cause us to desire to serve and obey Christ in all things as the pleasing work of God in us
3. passage – Hebrews 6:1-12

b. outline

1. Explaining the Question
2. Exegeting the Question
3. Exemplifying the Question

c. opening

1. some **greetings** to open the sermon (**note**: it has been since 2012 that I last preached at the DSFC)
2. some **assumptions** to open the sermon
 - a. the consistency of the Apostle Paul (and the entire NT) of the relationship between **faith** in Christ and the **life** of the one **claiming** faith in Christ

e.g. “for this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:2)
 - b. his assumption that those who come to Christ for salvation are **purposed by God** to be transformed in the fullest sense unto a state of holiness and perfection in the sight of a holy God
 1. **i.e.** that it is the **intention** of God (in his decree) not just to “populate heaven,” but to create a people perfectly fitted for entry into his glorious presence (**Romans 8:29**)
 2. **i.e.** that the people he has elect unto himself are not simply “better” versions of the rest of humanity, but a people **designed** by God to be utterly glorified into a state of being, *soul and body*, perfect and holy and righteous before him, far more glorious (even) than Adam himself
 3. **i.e.** the Confession follows the chapters on Faith (14) and Repentance (15) with a discussion of Good Works (16), Perseverance (17), and Assurance (18)
 - a. **IOW**: it makes the same assumption: those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ by faith *will (and must)* do the good works flowing out of that faith, persevering, and being assured of their salvation in those works *all as a function of God’s purpose in them*
 - c. **given the consistency of this revelation in the NT, it should be central to the understanding of every church and every believer – yet, it seems to be very rare in the modern church**
 1. **reality**: the typical “Christian” believes that the *actual* intention of God is **to make us happy**
 - a. **i.e.** the “goal” of the gospel is for us to escape any “negative” sense of God (which has all but disappeared too!) so that he can make us “feel good” about ourselves and our existence
 - b. **e.g.** the *thrust* of the push towards social justice flows out of an “emotionalism” that now characterizes the church – **i.e.** if I can go out and “solve” an injustice, then I will feel good about myself, which is what God really wants me to experience
 - c. **IOW**: the effort does not intrinsically flow out of a commitment to Christ, but out of a desire to be happy – the teaching that happiness trumps everything else in life
 2. **truth**: God’s purpose is, for those he calls to himself and justifies by faith, to be transformed *outwardly* to reflect the *inward* nature he has planted within them – **to make us holy**
 - a. **i.e.** that those who have been declared righteous by faith inwardly (as justified) will reflect that change of nature in every aspect of their outward life (as sanctified and glorified)
 - d. so ... I start with this assumption: **God has purposed for us to “work out our salvation” in that our justified state should be reflected in every aspect of our daily lives – that what we do in submission to Christ transforms us into the image he has purposed for us to possess**

I. Explaining the Question

Content

a. the question posed

1. given that we cannot bring any good work to God in order to be *saved*, how is it that God can accept any of our good works to be *sanctified*?
 - a. or, given that salvation itself is entirely a work of faith, how then can our life, *sinful and imperfect as it is*, be useful to God in accomplishing his purposes in us?

- b. or, knowing that our justification is only by an empty hand of faith in the promises of God in Christ, how can we then *dare* to come to God with our *puny* acts of goodness and think that God will then accept them from us as a part of his larger purpose to sanctify and glorify us?
 - c. or, how can we be confident in our sanctification *given that we know just how sinful and imperfect* our actions truly are (particularly *religious one*)?
 - d. or (as some say): how can we be confident in our *justification* if our sinful and imperfect actions in life
2. **note:** this question is answered by most “Christians” today by referring back to their original presupposition: that the gospel is primarily about our *happiness*, therefore no discussion of *sanctification* is ever necessary – the “acceptance” of our religious duties is never in question!
- b. the question explained**
- 1. **my duty:** the specific paragraph of Chapter 16: Of Good Works in question (#6)
 “Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprovable in God’s sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.”
 - 2. **my thesis: the true follower of Christ focuses not on the weaknesses of his feeble attempts to please God, but recognizes that his imperfect acts of faith are a part of his relationship to God in Christ and are acceptable because of being in him**
 - a. specifically, our weakness in this life should not cause us to question our salvation (our justification), but should be understood within the larger framework of God’s will to use even the feeble actions of his elect to accomplish his sanctification (glorification) of them

II. Exegeting the Question (Hebrews 5:9-6:12)

Content

a. the larger context of the passage (5:9-10)

- 1. the letter of Hebrews is written by a Jewish author (not Paul!) to a Jewish audience struggling to understand the relationship of Christ to the OT Levitical system
- 2. specifically, that Jesus is the **Supreme High Priest**, who:
 - a. comes from a perfect line – not the constantly-dying Levitical priesthood, but from Melchizedek
 - b. offers a sacrifice in the perfect tabernacle – not in a temple, but the very presence of God himself
 - c. offers a perfect sacrifice – not an animal, but himself, as the Lamb of God, perfect, free of blemish
 - d. offers a completed sacrifice – not repetitiously, but once for all, making a finished atonement
- 3. **read 5:9-10:** Christ is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him – not just those who “claim” him in some “theoretical” sense (i.e. by profession), but who submit themselves to him as Lord
 - a. they recognize Jesus as *their* perfect high priest who has reconciled them to God, period

b. the immediate context of the passage (5:11-12; 6:1-2, 4-6)

- 1. **vv. 5:11-6:12** are somewhat of an **excursus** away from the main point of the letter (**see above**)
- 2. **read 5:11-12:** the writer **scolds** his audience for being *immature* – the things of Christ being outlined in the letter **should be understood by every Christian** – they are **fundamental**
 - a. **e.g.** the emotionalism (happiness) of the modern “gospel” is indicative of *immaturity*
- 3. **read 6:1-2:** the writer **commands** his audience to leave behind discussions of the basics of “being saved” and to move on to deeper understanding of what it means to be a Christian in this world
 - a. **i.e.** the immature are constantly “looking backward” and questioning the nature of their *justification*, when they should be “looking forward” to the purposes of God in their *sanctification*
 - b. **e.g.** the constant **questions of assurance** related to continuing imperfection (and sin)
- 4. **summarize 6:4-6:** the writer **warns** his audience that a lack of maturity in these theological matters (i.e. a wrong focus) places the believer in danger of **apostasy** (i.e. falling away entirely)
 - a. **reality (see James White):** there is a massive apostasy about to take place in the church
 - 1. God is *shaking* his church (as through a sieve) by removing his hand of restraint (**Romans 1**), allowing opposition and persecution to come against it – this sifting is *necessary* (**see history**)
 - 2. **the pandemic has kicked opened the door of the church, and a rising leftism will now push many out that door, never to return**
 - b. the apostasy about to fall is because most do not see Christ as their High Priest, having *completed* an atonement for them, but simply as an “example to follow” towards happiness – thus, when *unhappiness comes*, they are ill-equipped to remain faithful (**1 John 2:19**)
 “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us ...”

c. the main point of the passage (6:7-8, 10-12)

1. **summarize 6:7-8:** the writer *reminds* his audience (with an example) of the *fundamental* principle:
 - a. **namely:** faith in Christ *will* produce tangible *evidence* of itself in all of life – there is an undeniable connection between *faith* and *works* = true faith *will* result in a changed life
 - b. **i.e.** the rain that falls on land is *only* valuable if it produces a crop – (**see above**) those who repent of their sin and trust in Christ by faith *will (and must)* do the good works flowing out of that faith
2. **read 6:9:** the writer *returns* to his direct address to the audience
 - a. although he was scolding them before for their lack of maturity (**in vv. 5:11-12**), he now turns to a **confidence** that they can (and will) move on to the deeper realities of sanctification in their lives
3. **highlight 6:10:** the writer *reveals* a key point: God will *not* overlook the works done by the believer; God will not “ignore” the feeble and weak attempts by the true believer to serve God and obey Christ
 - a. **principle: the good works of the believer are accepted by God because such a person is “in Christ” – the works of sanctification (living out faith in life) are pleasing to God not because they are perfect in us, but because they are “in His Son”**

“Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unreprouable in God’s sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.”

III. Exemplifying the Question

Content

a. why are our good works accepted?

1. not only is Jesus the **Supreme High Priest**, who offers a perfect sacrifice in a perfect tabernacle in a perfect priesthood unto a perfect atonement for his own, but he also ...
2. **brings his own into the presence of God** – not like the High Priest who *alone* could enter the Holy of Holies, but as a General who brings us as the *spoils* of his victory into the presence of his Father
 - a. the **mystical union** is the intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and his people, a *federal union* of Christ with those whom the Father has given him, a union in which the elect *vicariously* participate in all of the work of Christ (**i.e.** we die, rise, and live *in him*)
 - b. **i.e.** the good works of all who are given to Christ by the Father are accepted by the Father because the Father accepts the works of his own Son, *and our works are a part of his work*
 1. **note vv. 11-12:** the true believer turns away from elementary discussions of “being saved” to the positive work of *sanctification* – knowing that we are included in the person and work of Christ *in the very presence of the Father* we strive to emulate him and to be conformed to him through obedience and service (**i.e.** we are not “*sluggish*” = **hesitating between two points**)
3. **summary: the good works of the believer are accepted by God because they are a part of his eternal plan to conform a people to the image of his own Son in his very presence**
 - a. or, as Paul would say (**Colossians 1:9-10**)

“And so, from the day we heard [of your faith], we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God ...”
 - b. **stop looking back and questioning your justification – look forward and pursue obedience: the proof of your justification is found in the increase of your sanctification**